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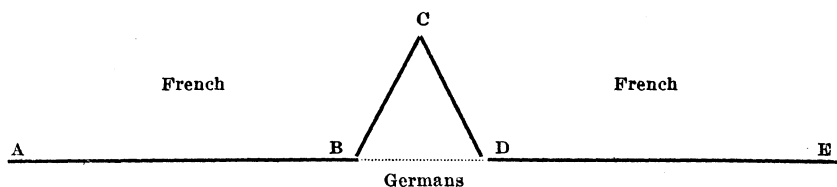
THE STRATEGY ON THE WESTERN FRONT—IV

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WE have seen how the Germans by massing overwhelming forces against weak sectors of the Allied front succeeded in forcing it back, in three cases, from ten to thirty-five miles, but in no one were they able to break completely through the line. And the reason for this was, that in each instance, as they moved forward through the enemy's entrenched lines, they created a situation which made their own lines more and more vulnerable and harder and harder to defend. In other words, they created a salient.

A salient is vulnerable; its weak points strategically are along its sides near its base, because an attack in force there, by threatening the communications of the occupying troops, would, if successful, force their retreat.

Then, too, any advantage of a central position—of interior lines—that may be possessed by troops occupying a salient is overbalanced by the advantage which the enemy has of interior lines within the angular fronts on each side of the salient. To illustrate: Let the line ABCDE represent the front between the two opposing armies. Now if,



on account of their central position, the troops occupying the salient BCD have an advantage of interior lines, it must be evident that such advantage is more than counter-

balanced by the advantage of interior lines possessed by the opposing troops occupying the angles or counter-salients ABC and CDE.

But as a matter of fact, where a salient is small, or is well filled with troops, there is no strategical advantage for troops occupying it; on the contrary, there is a great strategical disadvantage; first, because they have a too limited space in which to maneuver; and secondly, because they are subject to a converging fire from the enemy occupying the counter-salients. Troops within a salient are not infrequently so situated that long range guns from one or the other side of it can enfilade or take them in reverse.

Then, too, the numerous roads and railways within a salient, although absolutely necessary for the movement of men and supplies, are strategically a source of weakness to the occupying troops, principally because they can be fired upon from many angles and often be enfiladed throughout long stretches by the guns of the troops occupying the counter-salients or by the guns at the nose of the salient. And the nature of the terrain, and direction and position of the roads within a salient, of course, influence greatly the strategical situation of the occupying troops, but these are special cases which would call for a special analysis.

Then, again, a salient is *per se* not only weak, but it weakens the whole front by greatly lengthening it, making it necessary, of course, to use many more troops to defend it. Thus the sides BC and CD would require more than twice the number of troops to defend them than would the base BD, which was the line of the original front. And, naturally, when these salients are multiplied, the strength of the front becomes much weakened since its length becomes proportionately greatly increased. But, on the other hand, it should be borne in mind that the weakening is not confined to one side, since the front of the opposing army is correspondingly lengthened and likewise weakened.

Having pointed out the weakness of a salient to the side occupying it, attention is invited to the fact that, after the great German attack of March 21, 1918, upon Amiens had been checked, and prior to the German attack south of Ypres on April 9, 1918, there was offered a splendid opportunity for striking a telling blow at the base of the Amiens salient. Such a blow, could it have been made in sufficient force, would have threatened the communications of the

troops occupying it, and compelled them either to retire or to fight desperately to prevent the Allies from breaking through the salient at its base. And, in either case, the result would, no doubt, have put a stop to the attack south of Ypres, as well as to any further offensive by the Germans upon either side of the angular front.

But the failure of General Foch to take advantage of this opportunity to attack at the time, was no indication that he did not fully appreciate the vulnerability of the Amiens salient to an Allied attack. On the contrary, his subsequent masterly operations, beginning with his great counter-offensive against the Chateau Thierry salient on July 18, 1918, and continuing until every German salient, including that of St. Mihiel, had been ironed out and the Germans driven back to the Hindenburg line and even beyond, were indisputable proofs that he appreciated fully the weak points of the salients and knew where and how to attack them.

Up to and including the beginning of the great attack by the Germans in March, 1918, there was no supreme commander of the Allied armies. Each army was acting more or less independently; and as there was little or no co-ordination of their movements, serious consequences threatened. Especially was this true in the great German offensive in March. Then and there was seen the absolute necessity of a commander-in-chief of the Allied armies; as a result, on March 28, just one week after the beginning of this great offensive, General Ferdinand Foch, of the French Army, was appointed Commander-in-Chief.

But, prior to this time, there had been much opposition to such an appointment. As early as 1915, Lord Kitchener had suggested Allied co-ordination, but nothing was done in the matter. In July, 1917, at a conference of the chiefs of the Allied staffs of Great Britain, France, and Italy, a resolution was passed urging the necessity of unity of action, if success was to be achieved; but no commander in chief was appointed. Then in November, 1917, at a conference of the Premiers of Great Britain, France, and Italy and the chiefs of staff of the Allied armies, held at Rapallo, near Genoa, Italy, the appointment of a generalissimo, who should control all the Allied armies, was proposed; but Lloyd George, the British Premier, stated that he was utterly opposed to this plan. Accordingly, and

as a sort of compromise, an Inter-Allied strategic board, to be known as the Supreme War Council, was created. It was to consist of the Prime Minister and a member of the government of each of the great Powers whose armies were fighting on the Western fronts. Its first act was the creation of an Inter-Allied General Staff, consisting of General Foch of the French army, Wilson of the British army, and Cadorna of the Italian army.

There was strong opposition in Great Britain and in the British army to the creation of this Supreme War Council, principally on the ground that the proposals therein for obtaining unity of action would not only subordinate the military chiefs to political control, but were bound to be unworkable and militarily ineffective; and in the House of Commons on November 14, 1917, Lloyd George made this statement:

The Council will have no executive power, and final decision in the matter of strategy and the distribution and movements of the various armies in the field will rest with the several governments of the Allies. There will therefore be no operations department.

On November 18, 1917, President Wilson made public a cablegram to Colonel Edward M. House, in which he stated emphatically that the United States Government considers "unity of plan and control between the Allies and the United States essential," and asked him, with General Tasker H. Bliss, U. S. Army, as military adviser, to attend the first meeting of the Council at Versailles, France, on December 1, 1917. This action of the President was understood as removing any doubts as to this Government's attitude towards the Supreme War Council. Indeed, it was practically equivalent to giving it its unqualified endorsement.

On December 6, 1917, General Foch was relieved as French representative on the Inter-Allied General Staff of the Supreme War Council to become the military adviser of the French Premier, Clemenceau, and General Weygand was appointed in his place.

The third session of the Supreme War Council was held January 30 to February 2, 1918, at Versailles. From the official statement of the proceedings issued February 3, it appears that the decisions taken by the Council at this meeting "embrace not only a general military policy to be carried out by the Allies in all the principal theatres of

war; but more particularly a closer and more effective co-ordination, under the Council, of all the efforts of the Powers engaged in the struggle against the Central Powers."

In the House of Commons on February 5, Andrew Bonar Law, Chancellor of the Exchequer, in reply to an inquiry, announced that no generalissimo had been appointed by the Council at this meeting; and on the same day it was announced from Washington that "for the present no assent to any policy or declaration involving considerations other than those purely military will be given by any American representative sitting with the Council until it has first been submitted to this Government and received its approval."

Thus it is seen that notwithstanding the statement of the British Premier, the Supreme War Council at this meeting proceeded to formulate the military policy which was to be carried out and that it was anxious for a clearer and more effective co-ordination, not through the appointment of a generalissimo, but "under the Council itself"; and that the United States Government by implication gave its consent to any policy or declaration of the Council involving purely military considerations; but withheld its assent as to other considerations until they had been submitted to and approved by it.

But the important point of the whole matter is that no generalissimo, no commander-in-chief, was appointed; and that the supreme control of the Allied armies continued to remain in the hands of this Council and would probably have so remained indefinitely had not the great attack of the Germans in March made absolutely necessary the immediate appointment of a commander-in-chief.

Major General Sir Frederick B. Maurice, of the British Army, says that at this session this Council "vested the supreme control of the Allied forces on the Western front in an executive board composed of the representatives of the American, French, Italian, and British armies under the presidency of General Foch"; and that "this was in effect putting the higher command of the Allied operations in the hands of a committee."¹

But whether the higher command was to remain in the hands of the Supreme War Council itself or in the hands

¹ Maurice, in *Review of Reviews*, August, 1918, p. 158.

of the executive board appointed by it, matters not; for in either case failure was bound to result. History proves this; invariably when the supreme control of armies has been vested in a council, or committee, failure has resulted, and always will so result; for a decision by a council, or committee, means delay, discussion, compromise; and these are fatal in war. It must be evident that no party to a compromised decision could, if called upon to execute it, have full confidence in the result, since he would be bound to feel that his own proposal would be much better. In war there must be promptness of decision, singleness of purpose, boldness of action, confidence in one's own plan; to delay, to discuss, to compromise is to court defeat.

It was fortunate for the Allies that they were wise enough to appoint General Foch Commander-in-Chief at the time they did, and not to leave the conduct of the campaign to this Supreme War Council. And it was unfortunate that they had not been wise enough to appoint him commander-in-chief when the question of unity of command was first raised; or, at least, to have appointed him before March 21, 1918, and by so doing have given him a chance to formulate his plans and make ready to meet that great attack. "To the Aulic Council," said Jomini in 1804, "Austria owes all her reverses since the time of Prince Eugene of Savoy."

In this connection, Napoleon's views upon the supreme importance of unity of command may not be out of place. In one of his maxims he has said: "Nothing is so important in war as an undivided command." And in his first Italian campaign, when the Directory, which was jealous of his brilliant success in Italy, proposed to put a check on his career by sending General Kellerman to share with him the command of his victorious army, he submitted his resignation and wrote the Directory:

It is the highest degree impolitic to divide the Army of Italy; and it is equally contrary to the interests of the Republic to put over it two generals. * * * If you weaken your means by dividing your forces; if you break in Italy the unity of military thought, I tell you with sorrow, you will lose the finest opportunity that ever occurred of imposing laws on Italy. * * * Every one has his method of carrying on war. Kellerman has had more experience and may do it better than I. Together we should do nothing but harm. Your decision in this matter is of more importance than the fifteen thousand men the Emperor of Austria has sent to Beaulieu.

And to Carnot he wrote:

To associate Kellerman with me is to desire to lose all. I can not serve willingly with a man who believes himself to be the best tactician of Europe; moreover, I believe one bad general to be preferable to two good ones. War is like government—a thing of tact.

Thus we see that Napoleon looked upon unity of command as the supreme essential in winning a war; that he regarded it of more importance than the reinforcements sent his adversary; and that so strong was his belief on this point that he even declared that one bad general in command of an army was better than two good ones.

In no campaign in history has unity of command played a more important part than in this great world war. The operations of the Central Powers were directed by Germany. The Supreme authority was the commander-in-chief of the German armies, who was advised and assisted by the German General Staff and his immediate staff officers. The Austrian, Turkish, and Bulgarian armies all obeyed this supreme authority. In consequence, there was among the Central Powers unity of command, resulting in unity of thought, unity of purpose, and unity of action. The effect was that whenever a plan of operations was decided upon, all the resources and available military strength of the Central Powers were brought to bear to make it a success. To this unity of command, was largely due the fact that Germany won such great victories in Russia, Italy and the Balkans and, despite her stupendous strategical blunders, came near, on at least three occasions, to winning the war on the Western front.

But on the side of the Allies there was for nearly four years neither a commander-in-chief nor any unity of action. Each of the Allied armies acted to a great extent independently of the others. There was little co-ordination between them, and such as there was, came about through mutual consent and not because it was in any way obligatory upon them. The result was that for four years the Allies were compelled to fight almost entirely on the defensive, and at the Marne, at Verdun, and on March 21, 1918, came desperately near to final defeat, although during a good part of that time they had a numerical superiority in fighting forces.

Of course the successes of the Central Powers cannot be attributed entirely to unity of command nor the reverses

of the Allies entirely to a lack of it, but unquestionably it had much to do in determining these results; so much, indeed, that it is doubtful whether the war could ever have been won by the Allies without the appointment of a commander-in-chief of the Allied armies.

One of the remarkable facts connected with this war is that it should have continued nearly four years without a commander-in-chief of the Allied armies; and that in less than eight months after his appointment, it should have been brought to a close. And still more remarkable, perhaps, is the fact that the Allies should have permitted the war to continue for almost four years without making any serious attempt to appoint a commander-in-chief. The appointment, it is true, was considered and discussed by those in authority, but when they came to act, the nearest approach to it—until it was, so to speak, actually forced upon them by the great German drive of March 21—was to appoint a Supreme War Council.

But it does not necessarily follow that, had a commander-in-chief been earlier appointed, the war would have been sooner ended; for that would have depended upon the commander-in-chief selected. It is war that develops the genius of command and of generalship; and the selection of an Allied commander at the beginning of the war would have been no easy task. And yet, General Foch's brilliant operations in the first battle of the Marne clearly indicated that he would have been a most suitable man for the place.

(To be continued.)